

Trucial Oman MK4

THE PRINCIPALITIES

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I. ABU DHABI

This principality is the largest in area and only second in importance to Shārjah. It stretches along the coast from the creek of Ghanādhah on the N. to that of 'Odeid on the W., a distance of over 200 miles. Towards the interior the boundaries are ill defined; they are said to extend on the E. to the Bireimi oasis, and on the S. to the margin of the Ruba' el-Khāli desert. The settled population is believed to be between 10,000 and 15,000, while the Bedouins (chiefly Beni Yās and Manāsir) may number nearly 4,000. The ruling Sheikh is Hamdān ibn Zeid el-Khalifah, who succeeded his brother Tahnūn in 1912, and is described as a firm ruler, able to maintain order. During the period of anxiety following the victories of Ibn Sa'ūd of Nejd in 1913, he endeavoured to introduce arms and ammunition on the plea that the Emir might invade his territories (see above). In the same year he negotiated a truce between the Sultan of Oman and the rebel chiefs. He appears to be a worthy descendant of his predecessor Zeid ibn Khalifah, who in 1908 was the most powerful personality in Trucial Oman. The principality consists of the following districts from E. to W.: Abu Dhabi, Dhafrah (including Beinūnah and Līwah) Sabkhah Matti, Mijan, and 'Aqal, with the possible addition of Khatam. It further includes the islands of Arzanah, Dayyīnah, Dalmah, Dās, Qarnein Salāli, Yās, and Zirko.

i. *Abu Dhabi*, the 'home district', consists of undulating sandy desert, with scanty grazing and poor water-supply; there are, however, wells on or near the routes to the Bireimi oasis at *Bul Huweil*, *Masheirif*, and *Juhar*, and at *Silmīyah*, 20 miles SSE. of Abu Dhabi town. *Sūq Iblis*, about 25 miles E. of the town, is a fantastically shaped outcrop of sandstone forming a landmark on the main Bireimi road. *Sameih*, 6 or 7 miles E. of Khōr el-Ghanādhah, is a hilly place with 7 wells of poor water used as a rendezvous by tribesmen of Abu Dhabi and Dibai when preparing for war. The only village of consequence is *Batīn* on the N. shore of the inlet of the same name, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles SW. of the nearest part of Abu Dhabi town; it consists of 130 date-branch huts belonging to the Āl Bu Maheir and Sūdān tribes; it has some date plantations with wells, and 50 pearl-boats.

The town of *Abu Dhabi* is situated on the coast, about 88 miles SW. of Shārjah, with a population of over 6,000. It extends for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles along the shore, and consists chiefly of mat huts,

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and is said to be a meeting-ground of the Beni Yās, Manāsir, and Na'im tribes. 634

Of the islands, only *Dalmah* and *Yās* need be described. The former lies more than 40 miles E. by S. of the mouth of the *Khōr el-'Odeid*, and about half that distance from the nearest point of the coast to the SE. It is 5 miles by $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and for the most part hilly, with wells of brackish water and deposits of red oxide of iron. There is a small settlement of Beni Yās; but the chief importance of the island is that at the end of the pearling season a temporary bazaar is set up, and persons engaged in the trade, including the Indian merchants of the Trucial Coast, go there to collect debts and purchase pearls. *Yās* is about 20 miles SE. of *Dalmah*, and only a few miles from the shore at *Jebel Dhannah*. It is $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles by 5 miles, with low shores, but central volcanic hills; at the S. end is a landlocked natural harbour known to British sailors as *Meriton Bay*, with a depth of 4-6 fathoms. Water is only obtainable after rain. The island is visited in winter by Beni Yās fishermen. 133 361

II. DIBAI

This small principality lies on the Gulf Coast S. of *Shārjah*, between *Abu Heil* on the N. and the creek *Khōr Ghanādhah* on the S.; its extent towards the interior is not precisely known. It consists of low sandy country without important natural features, the only hill being *Jebel el-'Āli*, 19 miles SW. of *Dibai* town, which, though only 225 ft. high, is a landmark visible for 17 miles. The town contains almost the whole settled population, the only other places with permanent inhabitants being the small coast village of *Jumeirah*, 3 miles to the SW., and the larger isolated village of *Hajarein*, 50 miles away to the SE. in the *Wādi Hatta*, an isolated dependency, geographically belonging to the Sultanate of Oman. 635 133 361

The ruler of *Dibai* is *Sheikh Sa'id ibn Makhtūm*, who succeeded his cousin *Būti ibn Suheil* in 1912, and is at feud with the latter's family. He is a wealthy chief, owing to the commercial importance of his capital, but his relations with the Indian Government have not been uniformly good; in August 1913 he had to be warned because a boat of H.M.S. *Sphinx* was fired on from the town. There had been trouble under previous rulers, chiefly owing to the use of *Dibai* by smugglers of arms (see above, p. 336). 622

The town of *Dibai*, with a population perhaps not far from 20,000, lies 7 miles SW. of *Shārjah* and 79 miles NE. of *Abu Dhabi*, on both sides of a creek with a shallow entrance extending some miles to the SE.; it was once walled, but with the exception of towers on 361 438 162

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the landward side, the defences are ruinous. There is good water in wells from 5 to 30 ft. deep. The town has three main quarters: (1) *Deirah*, on a tongue of land on the NE. side of the creek, between it and the sea, with a date-grove at the back, contains the main bazaar of 350 shops and about 1,600 houses, inhabited by Arabs, Persians, Baluchis, and others; (2) *Shandaghah*, on the SW. side of the creek, contains a residence of the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, with about 250 houses all occupied by Arabs, domicile being forbidden to others; (3) *Dibai* proper, on the same side but farther from the sea, with about 200 houses, 50 shops, and the principal mosque, is the quarter in which British-Indian subjects are collected.

The chief elements of the population are: Beni Yās (440 houses), Āl Bu Maheir (400 houses), mixed Arabs, including natives of Hasa, Bahrein, and Koweit (400 houses), Persians (250 houses), Sūdān (250 houses), and Baluchis (200 houses). The people own about 4,000 date-trees; other cultivation is confined to a little lucerne; live stock includes nearly 2,000 camels, 400 donkeys, 400 head of cattle, and about 1,000 goats. There are about 335 pearl-boats, and 20 sea-going vessels.

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The importance of Dibai lies in its increasing use as a port of call for steamers, which lie outside the creek; the place has largely supplanted Lāgeh in Persia as the chief distributing centre of foreign goods to the interior, especially to the Bireimi oasis. Before the war, steamers of the British India and Bombay and Persia Steam Navigation Companies called at the port, the first at regular fortnightly intervals.

III. SHĀRJAH

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This is the most important of the principalities, having coasts on both gulfs, and covering a considerable portion of the Oman promontory. With the exception of the Sheikhdoms of 'Ajmān and Umm el-Qaiwein on the W. coast, and a part of the interior which is to all intents and purposes independent, it practically includes everything between a line from Sha'am to Dibah on the N., and Shārajah town and Khōr Kalba on the S. The principality is nominally all under the Sheikh Khālid ibn Ahmed, who succeeded Sajar ibn Khālid in 1914. But, as in Bahrein, his resources are curtailed by the cession of important territory as fiefs or appanages. The Sheikh rules Shārajah town and district, and the Oasis of Dheid is administered by a Vali in his name. But Ras el-Kheimah, under the late reign, had almost attained a recognized independence; and the important Shameiliyah district on the Gulf of Oman, nominally a fief held by a member of the ruling family residing in 'Ajmān, has

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broken from control under the influence of the sheikh of Fujeirah. The town of Dibah, the appanage of another relative, who enjoys the title of Vali, in like manner adds nothing to the exchequer of the Sheikh. 635.

The principality, in its undiminished state, consisted of four districts, Ras el-Kheimah in the N., Shameiliyah on the E., Dheid in the interior, and Shārjah proper on the W. The island of Sirri is claimed by Persia, and is no longer effectively occupied by the Sheikh of Shārjah. The districts are described in the following sections: 634

i. *Ras el-Kheimah* is divided from the Ru'ūs el-Jibāl district of the Oman Sultanate on the NE. by a line running obliquely from Ras esh-Sha'am on the W. coast of the promontory to a point between the villages of Dibah and Bei'ah on the E. coast; on the W. its boundary is the sea; the S. boundary follows a line drawn from Jezirat el-Hamra to the S. extremity of the Jiri plain, from which point a line to Dibah forms the limit on the SE. The district consists of low sandy desert near the sea, rising to the hill country of the Oman promontory. Its chief subdivisions are the plain of Sir, a cultivated strip on the coast, extending from about 3 miles S. of Rams to about 7 miles S. of Ras el-Kheimah town, with a length of about 12 miles and an extreme breadth of about 5 miles in the S.; and Jiri, immediately S. of Sir, a cultivated plain of dark soil between the Oman hills on the E. and sandy desert on the W. The upper part of the Wādi Hām, dividing the district from Shameiliyah, belongs to Ras el-Kheimah. Several islands are also connected with the district. *Jezirat el-Hamra* (also called *Jezirat ez-Za'āb*), which is low and sandy, lies 12 miles WSW. of Ras el-Kheimah town; it runs for 2 miles parallel to the coast, with which it is nearly joined at low water. *Bu Mūsa*, in the Gulf, about half-way between Shārjah town and Lingeh on the Persian coast, has a maximum length of about 3 miles; it also is low and sandy, with occasional isolated hills, possessing about 20 wells and a small date plantation. There is a permanent population of about 20 households from *Khān* in Shārjah, owning pearl-boats and live stock, and a shifting population composed of fishermen from the mainland of Oman and Persians who work deposits of red oxide of iron for a Lingah contractor. *Sir Bu Na'air* lies about 70 miles from the coast, a little S. of W.; it is $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles by 2 miles, uninhabited, with hills of volcanic rock, a low sandy point in the SE., and neighbouring pearl-banks; it possesses brackish wells and salt deposits in the hills. *Tunb*, about 32 miles NE. of Bu Mūsa, with a few permanent inhabitants and a well on the S. side, is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in diameter, and rises 634
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361 2. *Heir*, between Shārjah town and 'Ajmān, defended by 7 or 8
621 towers; 250 houses of Na'im, owning 25 pearl-boats, 2,500 date-
438 palms, and live stock of camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats;
wells 3-5 fathoms deep.

3. *Khān*, on the N. side of an inlet about 2 miles SW. of Shārjah town. About 200 houses, chiefly of stone set in gypsum mortar or mud; inhabitants, Āl Bu Maheir, Mazārī, and Manāsīr, owning 74 pearl-boats and 40 fishing-boats, with camels, donkeys, cattle, and goats.

IV. 'AJMĀN

• 635 A small principality consisting of the town of the same name and
361 its environs, situated 6 miles SW. of Hamriyah, and 5 miles NE. of
621 Shārjah, in the territory of which it forms an enclave. It lies on
438 the S. side of the entrance of a creek with 5 feet of water on the bar at low tide. The population is less than 1,000, chiefly Āl Bu Maheir and Na'im, all pearl-divers and fishermen, owning about 40 pearl-boats and 25 fishing-boats. Fresh water is obtained from wells 9 ft. deep, of which the locality is constantly changing. There are date plantations with about 2,000 trees, but no other cultivation. Live stock includes camels, donkeys, cattle, goats, and a few horses.

The Sheikh, Hāmid ibn 'Abd el-'Aziz, who succeeded his murdered father in 1910, is of a rough and quarrelsome character; he has given trouble by connivance at the illicit traffic in arms. Friendly relations usually subsist between the Sheikh and the inhabitants of Bireimi.

V. UMM EL-QAIWEIN

Another small principality composed of a town with the adjoining country, and also forming an enclave in Shārjah. It extends northwards to Jezirat el-Hamra and southwards part of the way to Hamriyah. The town lies about 12 miles NE. of 'Ajmān and 18 miles NE. of Shārjah, on the E. end of a peninsula, forming, with a neighbouring island, a landlocked creek with very shallow entrance; it is defended by a wall across the isthmus, and by detached block-houses. There are about 1,000 houses, 250 of which are of stone, the rest of date-branches; they include 20 shops. The inhabitants, numbering some 5,000, belong chiefly to the Āl 'Ali tribe, and are mostly pearl-divers and fishermen, owning about 70 pearl-boats and 60 fishing-boats, with a sea-going vessel running to Bombay; about 20 boats are built yearly in the town. Live stock includes 720 camels, with donkeys, horses, sheep, and goats. The water is good, obtained from

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wells 6 ft. deep ; date plantations comprise about 1,500 trees. The only point of importance not on the coast is *Felej Al 'Ali*, about 16 miles SE. of the town, with about 5,000 date-palms belonging to the Sheikh, irrigated by a stream ; this is a place of assemblage for Bedouins in the Umm el-Qaiwein service when called to arms.

The Sheikh, Rashid ibn Ahmed, is at feud with his expelled half-brother Nāsir, who disputes his title. In 1914, on his persistent refusal to settle certain claims of Nāsir, Rashid was coerced by H.M.SS. *Fox*, *Dartmouth*, and *Odin*, and forced to pay Rs. 10,000, with a fine of Rs. 15,000.

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